

Wunder kids: child prodigies in dance

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Within each dancer lies the story of her talent--how she discovered it, how a teacher fostered it, how it grew within her. It may take years before talent is revealed. But occasionally a student's raw ability is so exceptional that it's almost spooky. That's when she might well be considered a prodigy. What does dance mean to a kid who seems to have been born doing it? What does such a student mean to a teacher? What can the dance world expect from such gifted young people? To find out, Dance Magazine spoke to several such children and their teachers.

Marion Dorantes, an 11-year-old boy from California, dances flamenco like a gypsy in Spain. Inspired by his older sister's dancing, Marion tried a flamenco class at age 4 and loved it. Seven years later, he's taking advanced classes with adults and performing with great success around Los Angeles. "Audiences just eat that little boy up," says Linda Vega, one of his teachers. "Marion totally gets flamenco. It's a complicated art form. It's not just the dance moves, it's the rhythms, the singing, the hand clapping, the guitar, and all of it together." Juggling classes, homework, and rehearsals can be hard, Marion admits. "But dancing feels really fun," he says, "and it's a time when you can express your feelings." He loves the fast footwork, and he likes performing to live music. "The singers can sing to you in different ways and it really gets me into the music," he says. His dream is to go to Spain to study and perform, and his teachers share that dream. "He's got an amazing talent. He belongs in Spain where he can be challenged, studying every day," says Vega. "When I announce him in my shows, I call him the nino prodigio."

Warren, now 14, loves improvisation. He also trains in ballet, which he believes helps his presentation as a tap dancer. He has performed with American Tap Dance Foundation's Tap City, and in Easel's Diary of a Tap Dancer, in which voiceovers of each dancer described their personal relationship to dance. "I talked about how accepting the tap dance community is of me and how willing they are to share their knowledge with me," says Warren. Looking ahead, he would like to perform with Tap City on tour. "My dream job would be to become a song and dance man."

With high arches, gorgeous extensions and a brilliant smile, 15-year-old Beth Miller has been catching teachers' eyes since she began studying ballet in the second grade. In sixth grade, she saw Sylvie Guillem perform Juliet with The

Royal Ballet in London, and she realized then that dancing was what she wanted to do. "Dancing is one of those things I just can't imagine my life without," she says. Studying in The Washington School of Ballet's Release-Time program, she has worked hard to develop the strength to support her flexible frame, and is extending her technique past her comfort zones. "I'm starting to like turns more and more. That used to be my weakness, but I've worked hard on them." Beth hopes to perform the role of Juliet herself one day, and she dreams of dancing for The Royal Ballet.